



BRITISH COLUMBIA CYCLING COALITION

#1-1035 Pakington Street, Victoria, BC, V8V 3A2

Phone: 250-721-2800

Email: info@bccc.bc.ca

Honourable Judith Reid
Minister of Transportation
Province of British Columbia

May 24, 2003

Dear Madam,

We are writing to you in a manner that we wish could be more positive, however, the process carried out by your staff has left us no alternative.

As we are sure you know, the BC Ministry of Transportation (MoT) has embarked on a pilot program to install shoulder rumble strips (SRS) on rural highways. This form of road treatment can and does have very negative effects on cyclists, many of which we have detailed following this letter. You should know that BC's cycling organizations are united in their concern about the effects of SRS. Both the British Columbia Cycling Coalition (BCCC) and Cycling BC have unanimously approved resolutions opposing SRS due to their adverse effects on cyclists, and have communicated these resolutions to your Ministry.

Despite this stance, representatives of both organizations have worked with Ministry staff to assist in finding solutions to the Ministry's concerns about run-off-road incidents while minimising the deleterious effects of SRS on the cycling environment. We felt we had developed a good working relationship with Mr. Richard Voyer, the MoT staff member in charge of this specific project. Even though we did not achieve all that we had sought, we felt that our input had been valued and had resulted in beneficial changes to the province's SRS guidelines. It was our understanding that the pilot program would be evaluated both in terms of its effectiveness and its impact on the cycling environment.

We regret to inform you that we have received many reports from cyclists of breaches of the current rumble strip guidelines. Shoulder rumble strips have been installed where it was our understanding they would not be. Cyclists have encountered and reported conditions in which the portion of the shoulder remaining after rumble strip installation has been made impassable for several reasons including, but not limited to, poor SRS installations, insufficient remaining width after installation and inadequate maintenance.

This information has been passed on to MoT staff, the MoT-PACC (Provincial Advisory Cycling Committee), the MoT Chief Engineer and subsequently to the responsible regional road authorities, one of whom responded. Ten kilometres of misapplied rumble strips were removed in the Fernie area at MoT's expense; some still remain and require remediation. Unnecessary installations will cost our province millions of dollars.

Through the means of the MoT-PACC, the BCCC has been communicating on the SRS issue with the MoT ADM and staff. In fact, we have requested information and an update on the locations of existing and proposed SRS installations in this province. The BCCC had requested to be informed of all changes to SRS guidelines and current status of the program. We had asked for a review of the problem areas and had requested a response from staff regarding any solutions they have found. These requests have been made at every PACC meeting to date. To this day the BCCC is still awaiting a response from staff to our requests.

In the meantime, we were contacted on May 15 by Mr. Alan Callander (MoT's Provincial Cycling Coordinator) with the news—unexpected by us and, we have been told, by him—that new rumble strip guidelines had been prepared. The draft guidelines, which he forwarded "for our information" addressed none of our concerns and, in fact, added to them considerably. We received these drastically altered guidelines only ten days prior to their scheduled presentation to your Ministry's Executive for approval on May 26.



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It appears that by means of these new guidelines your staff is seeking to address the deficiencies to which we brought their attention by simply changing the guidelines to accommodate them.

Over the last several years we have dealt with your Ministry's staff with patience and in good faith. Progress has been glacial, especially in comparison with other jurisdictions such as Quebec, Arizona and Oregon, which have made strong commitments to cycling. However, we sought to grow the positive relationship that we felt had been established. To now say that we feel we have been duped is not putting it too strongly.

In closing, we respectfully ask that your Ministry:

- immediately suspend the planned changes to the rumble strip guidelines;
- undertake a thorough review of the rumble strip pilot program, including an examination of rumble strip "best practices" as well as alternate means of addressing run-off-road incidents;
- share with the British Columbia Cycling Coalition any research that MoT carried out or gathered on rumble strips which led to the decision to consider their installation;
- commit to repairing deficiencies prior to installing additional shoulder rumble strips;
- resume open and honest consultation with the cycling community on this critical issue.

Please refer to the list, following this letter, of issues related to cycling and shoulder rumble strips.

We look forward to your early response on this important issue.

In addition, we look forward to meeting with you personally, at your earliest convenience. We wish to discuss with you the positive contributions cycling can make to our province's economy, health and environment, and the ways that our transportation infrastructure can be managed to achieve these benefits.

Sincerely,

Allan Dunlop, President
British Columbia Cycling Coalition (via e-mail)

C.C. Honourable Gordon Campbell, Premier
Ms. Kathie Miller, Assistant Deputy Minister, MoT
Mr. Dirk Nyland, Chief Engineer, MoT
Mr. Alan Callander, Provincial Cycling Coordinator, MoT
Mr. Richard Voyer, Senior Standards & Design Engineer, MoT

P.S. As this letter was being written we learned of an unfortunate incident involving a prominent BC cyclist. This gentleman, in his fifties, holds the distinction of having ridden the most recorded kilometres of any cyclist in Canada in 2002—a distance of close to 30,000 km. He prided himself on 28 years of cycling without a significant accident. Last Saturday, as he was cycling westbound out of Hope, he encountered shoulder rumble strips and fell, breaking his collarbone and straining his shoulder.

Encl.: list of issues related to cycling and shoulder rumble strips on following pages.



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Shoulder rumble strips have a direct and adverse impact on cyclists and bicycling. In many cases, the net effect is that the shoulders are no longer a safe place to ride a bicycle. For these reasons, the British Columbia Cycling Coalition strongly opposes shoulder rumble strips.

Here are some of the ways that rumble strips threaten the safety of cyclists:

- **Rumble strips are placed exactly in the preferred line of travel for cyclists.** On the average shoulder most cyclists will ride within 1/2 metre of the white fog line because this is the cleanest and smoothest part of the shoulder, and the most visible and therefore safest location on the shoulder. At night and in low visibility conditions cyclists often ride just beside the fog line to orient themselves on the road.
- **Rumble strips cause cyclists to lose control.** Bicycles are light and have thin, high-pressure tires and cyclists will easily crash when they hit rumble strips. SRS pose even more of a risk to cycle tourists, due to their additional luggage. Cycle tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism businesses in BC.
- **Rumble strips cause debris to collect on shoulders** because they prevent vehicles from sweeping the shoulders. Glass is a particular hazard.
- **Rumble strips collect debris and dangerous black ice.** Debris is not removed from rumble strips by the maintenance crews. Black ice is a common occurrence in BC, especially on the west coast.
- **Rumble strips can be used to harass cyclists.** Ill-intentioned drivers quickly learn that 'buzzing' cyclists by driving on the rumble strip shortly before reaching them will seriously frighten many cyclists.
- **Rumble strips restrict safety manoeuvres** by narrowing the safe lateral distance cyclists can use to avoid road hazards ranging from stopped vehicles to debris.
- **Rumble strips increase the hazard of many road conditions** such as areas where the road is already narrowed by features such as guard-rails, curbs, culverts, bridges, protruding mail boxes, or other hazards at the edge of the roadway.
- **Rumble strips restrict basic safe practices of responsible bicycle driving/handling.** Left turns, avoiding debris and passing of pedestrians, slower cyclists, maintenance crews and/or other slow-moving vehicles become difficult or hazardous manoeuvres.
- **Rumble strips are nearly invisible in low light or after dark.** For cyclists, whose headlights are significantly weaker than those of motor vehicles, rumble strips can be impossible to detect.
- **Rumble strips increase risk of road rage.** With SRS, some shoulders will likely become unsafe or uncomfortable to many cyclists, forcing even the experienced cyclists to ride in the travel lane with motorised traffic. For safety reasons, cyclists need to maintain a straight line as well as a substantial shy distance from the rumble strips. This will force cyclists to ride well into the travel lane. Motorists, unaware of the reasons why cyclists need to travel in the travel lane while a paved shoulder is present, are more likely to lose patience and, in worst-case situations, behave aggressively and endanger cyclists.



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There are other reasons why we urge MoT to not apply limited resources to the installation of shoulder rumble strips:

- The cost of rumble strips that have already been incorrectly installed could have funded much-needed education campaigns or infrastructure that would significantly benefit cyclists and motorists alike. The remediation of these hazards will incur additional cost to your Ministry. Unneeded SRS will cause our province to waste millions of dollars and to discourage cycle tourism—a growing, profitable sector of the economy.
- Rumble strips can negatively impact maintenance operations including plowing and sweeping, and in that regard the province faces the additional costs of a reduced pavement life.
- Run-off-road accidents, the primary reason given to install rumble strips, include a wide range of crashes, many of which will not be affected by the installation of rumble strips.
- Statistics supporting the installation of shoulder rumble strips are significantly skewed by long, straight, flat roads that are rare in British Columbia but that are more common in other parts of Canada and the United States.
- Other tools exist to reduce run-off-road incidents including education campaigns, better enforcement, and increased driver awareness.
- There has been no demonstrated public demand for rumble strips.

The BCCC appreciates that rumble strips can help reduce some run-off-road incidents on the small fraction of British Columbia's roadways that are straight and are conducive to drivers' falling asleep. However, there are numerous problems with using "run-off-road" accidents as justification for rumble strips. With due respect to our law enforcement officers, the contributing factors to crashes are not always easy to determine, whether because of unconscious or fatally injured motorists who cannot explain the causes for a crash or incomplete analysis of the crash site. There are many possible causes of run-off-road incidents. Rumble strips will not reduce run-off-road accidents when ice, wildlife, suicide, bad judgement, unsafe speed, or drinking (to name but a few factors) are involved.

Given the curving and rolling nature of most of British Columbia's rural highways, there is little argument for the installation of rumble strips as a general practice, and much argument against such installations.

In many jurisdictions throughout North America, substantial progress has been made in recognising the benefits of cycling to public health, quality of life, economy, environment, mobility, and transportation options. Given all the reasons to encourage and increase cycling, we strongly encourage MoT to reconsider the installation of rumble strips on all but limited access highways. Otherwise, much of the progress made in recent years will be eroded.

———— **End** ————